

Coins

Selling old money for 'top dollar' takes time, study

By Roger Boye

SELLING OLD COINS for "top dollar" is not an easy task, a Chicago couple discovered last month during a frustrating discussion with a Loop coin dealer.

"We were dismayed to find that our valuation for my husband's coins, based on current coin books, was about four times higher than what the dealer offered us. The dealer's price seemed unfair, so we didn't sell," said Mrs. Elizabeth M. Kong (not her real name), who also asked for advice about "what to do next."

Fortunately, the Kongs studied their coins before trying to sell them. The person who is ignorant about what he has is the person most likely to be taken by an unscrupulous dealer.

However, the Kongs and other collectors wanting to sell valuable coins must understand that most coin books list "retail values" for coins, the prices the "average dealer" might be expected to charge for old coins. Dealers buy coins for a "wholesale price" that might be at least 30 per cent below the retail selling price. Also, of course, even the "wholesale" coin price listings found in some numismatic books are no guarantee of value, because the prices are merely an indication of what a collector might expect to receive from a dealer.

Moreover, the Kongs must realize that supply, demand, and condition determine the value of a coin, not age. A few coins made less than 25 years ago (a 1955 "double die" cent, for example) are worth many

times the value of some coins from the early 1800s. The reasons are that many more people collect Lincoln cents than collect 19th-Century coins, and very few 1955 "double die" cents were made.

Most experts tell collectors to take their coins for sale to more than one dealer to get a variety of offers. If the Kongs have a relatively small number of coins in their collection, most dealers would be happy to appraise the coins and make an offer to buy them. However, some dealers may charge approximately 5 per cent of the appraised value to examine coins in larger quantities.

The Kongs also should go to dealers who specialize in what they have to sell. For example, if Kong has some silver certificate bills in his collection, he probably will get a better offer for the bills from a dealer who does a good business in United States currency.

Some collectors are able to sell coins at the higher "retail price" directly to other collectors. To do this, Kong should check the "coins wanted" advertisements in coin newspapers, and consider placing his own "coins for sale" ad in a coin periodical, or place a list of coins for sale in a public place (he should include only his phone number on the list; coin thefts are common). Incidentally, one good way to meet other collectors is to join a coin club.

Most important, perhaps, the Kongs should not be in a hurry. Otherwise, they may be forced to sell when the price of coins is down slightly, or they may not have the time or patience to do the proper spade work.